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ABSTRACT

The distinction between grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence as components of communicative competence is useful for helping students develop spoken language skills in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction. When individual speakers demonstrate strategic competence, they will use a range of expressions based on: (1) the speaker's linguistic knowledge; (2) the speaker's knowledge of the world; and (3) the speaker's assessment of the listener's linguistic and world knowledge. Native speakers and non-native speakers will differ in the degree of specificity or detail they require to encode the message. Teachers can learn more about the effective use of communication strategies by observing which ones native speakers select and how they use them. They can then use this knowledge to choose classroom activities likely to promote development of strategic competence. This could include providing specific elicitation materials and avoiding open topics for oral communication (e.g., "What did you do on vacation?"); creating situations for natural interaction; providing core vocabulary useful for the strategies of circumlocution and approximation; and requiring students to assess the success of various strategies. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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2. 'The arm of the chair is where you use for to write' Developing strategic competence in a second language

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We can see the record of many attempts to teach the 'spoken language' in various EFL/ESL textbooks published over the years. Early audio-lingual textbooks espoused the primacy of the spoken language, for example, and more recent 'notional-functional' textbooks aim to teach students how to perform a variety of oral communicative acts. But it is clear from such a survey of textbooks that different pedagogical goals may be subsumed under the general rubric of 'spoken language'.

In fact, all three components of communicative competence, as characterised by Canale and Swain (1980), seem to have been taken as pedagogical goals as various practitioners have taught 'spoken English'.

Consider, for example, the three exercises in Table One. Exercise A, to be performed orally, is teaching 'the spoken language'. But, more specifically, this exercise focusses on teaching students to **produce correct grammatical forms in their spoken language.** The aim of this sort of exercise is to develop GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE in the second language. Exercise B is from a more recent text. Clearly, this exercise is not primarily intended to teach grammatical correctness, but rather aims to teach students to produce 'spoken language' which is appropriate and polite. The aim of this sort of exercise is to develop SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE in the second language. Exercise C (from the same textbook as exercise B) is an example of a third type of exercise. Clearly, while the student is being given instruction in the use of 'spoken language' in exercise C, the primary aim of the exercise is neither grammatical correctness, nor situational appropriacy; the aim is to teach the student how to successfully perform a communicative act, in this case the act of successfully describing a referent so that the hearer can correctly identify it. Hence, the goal of this exercise is to improve STRATEGIC COMPETENCE: the ability to effectively perform communicative acts, such as successfully identifying intended referents. Strategic competence includes the ability to use communication strategies to make one's performance more effective by solving problems which may arise in the process of performing communicative acts.

Grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence have been

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TABLE ONE

Three exercises

Exercise A: 'Yes' and 'No' response. (Samelson 1974.)

1: repeat: Question
Response
Question and response together

a) Did we arrive in the city? Yes, we did.
b) Were we travelling fast? Yes, we were.
etc

Exercise B: (Jones 1977).

...British people are often very polite in the way they ask questions - if you want to be more direct, you may appear to be very rude! Anyway, personal questions have to be expressed tactfully. here are some useful opening expressions we use to lead up to questions:

I wonder if you could help me? I'd like to know...
I wonder if you could tell me...
This may sound like a stupid question, but I'd like to know...
Something else I'd like to know is...

Discuss with your teacher when such expressions might be appropriate.

Exercise C: (Jones 1977.)

a) You may often have to describe an object, or a piece of equipment or a machine or a gadget to people. You may need to do this because your listener is unfamiliar with the object or because you cannot think of the name for it. In describing an object we often have to answer questions like these:
what size is it?
what shape is it?
what colour is it?
what's it made of?

b) Here are some objects and gadgets to describe. Try to give a sustained description, bearing in mind the questions suggested...

a suitcase	your national flag
an egg-timer	the Union Jack

proposed elsewhere as components of communicative competence (see, for example, Canale and Swain 1980, Tarone 1984, Yule and Tarone forthcoming), all three being important but different goals of second-language teaching. I have found this distinction to be a most useful one to use in evaluating attempts to help students develop spoken language skills in the ESL/EFL classroom. ESL professionals need to bear in mind that the three exercises we have just examined are designed to teach very specific and different sorts of of spoken language skills. Exercise C for example will not necessarily teach students to produce either grammatically correct utterances or situationally appropriate ones. It is designed only to teach students to effectively perform a certain kind of communicative act.

Each of the three components of communicative competence is extremely important as a goal in the ESL classroom. A student who has failed to develop competence in any one of these three areas cannot truly be said to be proficient in English. Yet it is only recently that ESL textbooks and curricula have begun to include sociolinguistic and strategic competence as goals of instruction in the classroom. Although we now see an increasing number of textbooks and scholarly articles advocating a 'communicative approach' to the teaching of English, many such materials fail to clearly establish the nature of the 'communicative skills' being taught. Are the new materials designed to teach sociolinguistic skills: formal and informal register, stylistic norms, politeness? Or are they designed to give the students guidance and practice in effectively performing communicative acts, quite apart from grammatical correctness or situational appropriateness? Newer textbooks often seem to make an unclear distinction between sociolinguistic and strategic competence as pedagogical goals; the goal of 'communication' is often simply not analysed any further, resulting in a haphazard, rather than a systematic development of communicative competence. So, for example, exercises apparently promoting skills in these two different areas may be printed side by side in the same lesson with no apparent discrimination made between them. Even when the goal of an activity is clearly defined, it is not always easy to evaluate whether that activity is particularly effective in achieving that goal.

It would seem important for teachers and textbook writers alike to recognise that strategic competence is an ability which is distinct from both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, and to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom activities designed to foster it. To this end, in this paper I propose:

a) to describe some typical ways in which speakers perform their strategic competence, and
b) to suggest clear criteria for evaluating the usefulness

TABLE TWO

Language used to describe part of a Christmas tree:
NS: Native speaker NNS: Nonnative speaker

NS1	...three metal pieces about this long...about this wide..
NS2	...three sticks or bars that are metal that are curved...
NS3	...the three legs...
NS4	...three legs...
NS5	...three metal pieces which become the legs...
NNS6	...three same pieces that are the heat or you can say the feet...
NNS7	...has a legs...
NNS8	...three large objects to sustain the round object...
NNS9	...three long things...they has a special they have a special shape...
NNS10	...one part of this object...are going to use like legs..

of classroom activities designed to improve the ability of learners to perform their strategic competence in their second language.

Speakers draw upon their strategic competence when they attempt to perform communicative acts effectively - as when they successfully identify intended referents. To illustrate some typical ways in which speakers perform their strategic competence, let us consider two entities and the ways in which a group of individuals, both native speakers and nonnative speakers of English, referred to these entities in our study. Each speaker in this study was instructing a listener as to the proper procedure to be used in assembling an apparatus; the listener had to choose among three sequences of photographs the sequence which most closely approximated the instructions given.

Table Two reports some of the language used to describe part of a Christmas tree. A great deal of variability may be observed in the linguistic means used by both NS and NNS to realise this or any of the other acts of reference in our study. We believe that this is because strategic competence involves the ability to select an effective means of performing an act of reference, one which enables a particular listener to identify the intended referent. Thus, strategic competence is gauged not by degree of correctness (as with grammatical competence) but rather by degree of success, or effectiveness. Clearly, individuals may be able to successfully communicate their intended meanings without necessarily demonstrating a great deal of accuracy in target language linguistic form. Further, more than one linguistic form may prove to be successful under different circumstances, with different listeners. As the writer of exercise C points out, alternative

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linguistic expressions (such as descriptions of objects) must be used in situations where a listener is unfamiliar with an entity or where the speaker 'does not know the name for it'.

In fact, we believe that the **range** of expressions available to any speaker will prove to be dependent on at least three factors:

the speaker's linguistic knowledge;
the speaker's knowledge of the world; and
the speaker's assessment of the listener's knowledge of the language and the world.

For example, air conditioner repairmen have knowledge about air conditioner parts which will allow them to refer to those parts far more effectively than those of us who are not familiar with the inner workings of air conditioners. Where the listener shares this knowledge, the repairman-speaker's effectiveness in referring to air conditioner parts will be relatively high; where the listener does not share this knowledge, the range of effective expressions available to the repairman-speaker is likely to be greatly reduced. The range must be further reduced when one or other of the interlocutors does not have an adequate mastery of the language itself, and thus does not know the relevant linguistic expressions.

Thus, when individual speakers perform their strategic competence in making acts of reference, we may expect to observe a range of linguistic expressions, and we may expect that range to be defined by at least the three factors listed above. We may expect these factors to come into play regardless of whether the speaker is a native speaker of English or a learner.

Now let us return to the linguistic expressions used in Table Two. In some cases, simple nominals were used ('three legs', 'three long things') but in other cases a range of more complex nominal expressions were used. It is important to observe that while the native speakers employed a range of referring expressions, and the nonnative speakers employed a different range of referring expressions, those ranges overlapped. In general, the data we have shows that a wider range of expressions is used by the NNS group, with more complex nominal expressions appearing in this group. Possibly the NSs were more in agreement as to the level of detail required to identify an object.

One difference between NSs and NNSs is to be found in the degree of specificity, or level of detail, required in the encoding of the message. In deciding what to include and what to leave out of a message, there seems to be a level of detail which members of the NS group all agree upon. NNSs may provide more, or less, detail than this. The strategy of 'over-elaboration', where NNSs give more detail than the NSs, occurred very frequently in our study (Tarone and Yule forthcoming). Examples of over-elaboration on the part of learners occurred when they had to refer to a 'tablet armchair' in

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TABLE THREE

Descriptions of a 'tablet armchair': (i.e. a chair with a built-on desk top for writing on)

NS: native speaker NNS: nonnative speaker

NS1 ...her desk...
NS2 ...one of the front, desks...
NS3 ...on her...on her, ah, desk...
NS4 ...her desk...
NS5 ...where that girl was sitting...

NNS6 ...the...chair...
NNS7 ...the little table but eh what is the name of...the... in his chair...
NNS8 ...her table...
NNS9 ...a...chair...a desk...
NNS10 ...the arm, of the chair. The arm of the chair is when the, when you use for to write...

the course of narrating a story (see Table Three).

A good example of over-elaboration is NNS10's extended definition. Note that none of the NS group bothered to try and specify that this was a particular type of chair. On the other hand, there are areas where the NNS group provided less detail than the NS group. In another task, referring to steaming water being poured from a pitcher, for example, a group of NSs all referred to both the water and the container, while all the NNSs referred only to the water, and not to the container. This may evidence a form of avoidance among the NNS group - viz: avoid describing whatever you decide you don't have to describe - a possible attempt to simplify their speaking task. NNSs, then, need to learn what level of detail is required in order for a typical listener to identify an object, to ensure the success of the communicative act.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

We may assume that in some cases the speakers encountered a problem in referring to these entities. Some seem to have been searching for a more precise nominal expression than the one they ended up producing; we presume this in some cases because the

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speakers tell us so, and in others because of hesitation and/or laughter on the part of the speaker, and a preponderance of more complex nominal expressions. In the research literature, the linguistic (and in some cases the non-linguistic) signals used by speakers in place of the more precise linguistic expression have been referred to as 'communication strategies'. But clearly, such communication strategies are a subset of the full range of linguistic expressions which may be observed when speakers refer to entities with the purpose of enabling listeners to identify them.

It is hard for the researcher to tell from the data in Tables One and Two whether any given speaker is using a communication strategy or not - i.e. whether the expression produced is precisely the expression the speaker desires, or whether it is a substitute for some other, more precise expression which the speaker would prefer to use. One way of establishing whether communication strategies have been used because of some lack of linguistic resources is to have individuals perform the same task in both their languages with the same interlocutor; where a speaker uses one linguistic expression in the native language, and some other expression in the L2, we might guess that the learner has used a communication strategy, in order to compensate for some deficiency in either his own linguistic resources for English or those of his listener. Another way of establishing the difference is to ask the speaker whether the referential expressions he used were in fact acceptable in communicating their intended meanings. This approach is fraught with other problems, notably lapses of memory on the part of the speaker, and the whole issue of whether speakers use strategies consciously or not.

Another approach, useful for the second-language teacher, is to avoid making any distinction at all between communication strategies and other sorts of referring expressions, but merely to note that there are simple and more complex such expressions, and to note any differences in the way NSs and NNSs perform the same task. Where differences are observed, there may be valuable teaching points to be found. After all, one of the goals of the teacher is simply to provide students with the linguistic resources they need to be effective in performing communicative acts. The pedagogical goal must therefore be to teach students both the relevant simple nominal expressions they are likely to need for particular tasks, and also the linguistic resources they need to use communication strategies. We would hope to provide students with enough of these linguistic resources that they can perform communicative tasks with the same degree of success as native speakers. What teachers want to avoid is clearly different behaviour on the part of NNSs - e.g. the abandonment of a message when the student does not know the word for the entity.

In spite of the difficulties involved in precisely defining the

phenomenon, there is no doubt that speakers often experience a problem when referring to entities, and that they resort to alternative means of identifying that referent. This is particularly common in attempts to communicate in a foreign language. Research on communication strategies has resulted in a number of taxonomies of typical types of communication strategies adopted in this situation, and one such taxonomy is provided in Table Four.

TABLE FOUR

A simple taxonomy of communication strategies (based on Tarone and Yule forthcoming).

Avoidance
- Topic Avoidance - the speaker tries not to talk about entities for which the desired expression is not known
- Message Abandonment - the speaker begins to talk about an entity but is unable to continue

Paraphrase
- Approximation - the speaker uses a simple nominal expression which shares enough features with the intended intended referential expression to satisfy a listener
- Word Coinage - the speaker makes up a new nominal expression to refer to the entity
- Circumlocution - the speaker describes the properties of the entity instead of naming it

Elaboration - the speaker builds redundancy into the message by by means of repetition, paraphrase and explication

Borrowing
- Literal Translation - a learner translates word for word from the L1
- Language Switch - a learner uses an L1 expression without translating

Appeal for Assistance - a speaker asks for the desired referential expression

Mime - the speaker uses nonverbal expressions

Obviously, some of these communication strategies will be more successful than others. The initial reaction of learners unused to dealing with problems in communication, is to avoid communicating

at all in such situations - and clearly such avoidance does not lead either to communication of intended meaning, or to the development of the resources needed to deal with future communication problems. Whether or not 'avoidance' is classified as a communication strategy depends on whether one has defined the notion of communication strategy as 'options for dealing with the problem' (which might include avoidance), or as 'alternative means of performing the communicative act' (which could not include avoidance). (See Tarone 1981.)

What sorts of linguistic resources are needed for the effective use of communication strategies? We may obtain a clue by looking at the strategies typically used by native speakers who are confronted by similar communication problems. On the whole - though not, as it turns out in Tables One and Two, - NSs are more likely than NNSs to use the strategies of circumlocution and approximation (Tarone and Yule 1983). These strategies require certain basic or 'core' vocabulary (see Carter 1982), and sentence structures useful for describing such things as shape, size, colour, texture, function, analogy, hyponymy, and so on. ESL students who are developing strategic competence will need to develop such linguistic resources. In our research we have found that even advanced ESL students may not be able to use terms such as 'end', 'topside', 'strap', or 'oval' - all useful expressions for describing entities. Certain linguistic expressions will prove to be useful again and again as similar exercises are repeated.

Given what we know about the nature of strategic competence, what sorts of classroom activities are likely to promote the development of strategic competence? Experience with elicitation tasks used in our research has led us to suggest the following criteria be used in evaluating any classroom activity designed to foster strategic competence.

First, students must be provided with carefully-designed communicative tasks. The teacher should choose a specific set of elicitation materials and avoid providing open topics such as 'tell me what you did during your holiday'. Since it is an important feature of strategic competence that the speaker is able to convey the intended meaning, then it is really necessary for the teacher to know what the speaker intends to convey. The teacher must therefore decide what the speaker is to describe or identify. It will then be a relatively easy matter for the teacher to determine the student's degree of success in the attempt to convey this very specific meaning. In addition to providing very specific topics, the teacher should ideally provide topics which lie both within and outside areas of the student's expertise. Such topics would provide speakers with practice in assessing a listener's expertise in some area of knowledge, and force them to resort to the use of

communication strategies in cases where referring expressions are not known, or not shared with the listener.

Second, the task must create a reasonable facsimile of communicative behaviour. Minimally, there must be a listener who does not already know the information being communicated. Asking the speaker to describe the Union Jack creates an odd situation for him. You are asking him to tell you what you can already be presumed to know. Furthermore, it is better if the listener is not an 'all-knowing' teacher. One of the key elements of strategic competence is the ability to assess the level of knowledge (of the world and the language) shared with one's partner. This obviously rules out a teacher. Next, it helps if the listener clearly has a need to know the information being communicated by the speaker. The listener then has a definite task to perform and a role to play in the communicative interaction. This sets up what is surely a more natural interaction than one in which the listener has no idea what her role is.

These criteria will now be used to evaluate exercises such as Exercise C, which seems to have the goal of promoting strategic competence. Exercise C fails to meet our second and third criteria: there is no recipient of the information whose knowledge must be assessed, and no obvious purpose for the communicative act. It is now clear what has to be added to make this exercise a better activity for promoting strategic competence.

The use of the type of classroom activity advocated here has two incidental, and, we feel, valuable effects for the language classroom. First, the task provides L2 learners with opportunities to produce extended spoken discourse in the second language. The speaker is put in the position of having to organise an extended message, and tailoring it to a particular listener for a particular communicative purpose. This exercise requires a performance which has much more in common with everyday communicative behaviour than the short phrases and single sentences typically produced in response to many classroom speaking exercises. Second, the task elicits language produced when the speaker is put in a position of concentrating on getting the message across rather than on getting the linguistic form correct. Thus, the teacher is provided with important information about the state of development of the learner's grammatical competence, information which may be useful on some future occasion when emphasis on linguistic form is at issue.

Given that appropriate classroom communication activities are provided, how ought they to be used? First, it is important to establish an objective baseline for performance on these tasks by asking native speakers of English to perform them. If our goal is to provide learners with the skills they need to perform their

strategic competence with the same degree of effectiveness as native speakers, then we need not some notion of ideal NS performance, but facts about the way NSs perform the same tasks. We may then be able to compare, for example, the level of detail provided by NSs and NNSs in describing objects.

Students should be provided with core vocabulary useful for the strategies of circumlocution and approximation, either by instruction before the tasks are undertaken, or by inductive instruction during the classroom exercise itself. In fact, while focussing upon the development of the students' strategic competence, it is most effective to use an inductive approach throughout with these tasks. One such approach might take advantage of evidence that individuals often perform speaking tasks like this better if they have previously played the role of listener (Anderson, Yule & Brown 1984). Thus, a few students might be asked to perform the task in pairs in front of the class, with the rest of the class observing, provided with copies of the listener's task. These classroom observers might be asked to arrive at their own assessment of the speaker's success in performing the task, and to list alternative expressions to the ones used by the speaker. Such a procedure would enable students to learn from one another as well as from their own speaking performances.

Another activity using an inductive approach would be to ask student observers to identify strategies which speakers use when they are unable to use a precise name for an entity, and to assess the degree of success of various strategies. Such an activity amounts to asking students to develop their own taxonomies of communication strategies - an exercise which might help them develop an awareness of the frequency with which communication problems arise in the real world, and the variety of linguistic resources available to speakers for the resolution of such problems.

Students should also be asked to assess the success of the initial strategy used by a speaker in performing, for example, an act of reference. Eric Nelson (personal communication) has hypothesised that certain initial strategies may be more effective and economical than others. In a classroom exercise where learners are asked to refer to objects so that listeners can identify them, these objects may be presented as **sets**: some objects are easier to identify when the speaker begins with expressions like 'It's a kind of....'; another set is best referred to with expressions like 'It's a part of...'; another group of objects seems easiest to identify in terms of function; and a final set of objects seems easiest to identify when the speaker initially identifies the 'associated circumstances' or 'context of occurrence'. Suggesting possible **best initial strategy**, or even sequences of strategies, seems to be useful in the second language.

Classroom activities which aim to teach 'the spoken language' must provide instruction and practice in all the components of communicative interaction. In this paper I have argued that we can do a better job of helping students to develop at least one of these components, strategic competence, by defining our goals more clearly than heretofore. I have summarised some research on the way in which NSs and NNSs perform their strategic competence in English, and I have outlined some criteria, based on that research, which will be useful in evaluating classroom activities designed to develop strategic competence.

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